

## Space, as it relates to Nationalism: Ramifications for the Taiwan Straits Crisis

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### ABSTRACT

Before the modern nation-states took form, borders between polities were often ill defined, with a political capital having more control over regions which are closer than those at a distance. However, the nation-state redefined a government's relationship to the region over which it claimed control, lending to a consolidation of control to the center and sharp-formed borders. This paper takes a historiographical approach to understanding space as it relates to the nation, and its ramifications for the Taiwan Straits Crisis. We will also look at how the theories and approaches used by environmental historians can be applied to Taiwan's place in the Chinese nation. This paper also explores the relationship of space and nationalism with the aid of works of theory, works which deal with both theory and practice in other polities in the world, this paper focusses those theories and practices to Chinese nationalism.

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### 1. Introduction

Before the modern nation-states took form, borders between polities were often ill defined, with a political capital having more control over regions which were closer than those at a distance. However, the nation-state redefined a government's relationship to the region over which it claimed control, lending to a consolidation of control to the center and sharp-formed borders. This state of the field essay will look at the historiography of space as it relates to the nation, specifically, as it relates to my research on Chinese nationalism and the dispute over the Taiwan Strait crisis. This is important as both the People's Republic of China, or PRC, and the Republic of China, or ROC, claim sole sovereignty over the Chinese nation despite the fact neither can agree on the nation's political border. My argument is that the nation-state controls a geographic, cultural, and ideology space in which it has sole authority in which to govern and administer. However, often sub-national groups of people carve out of that national space and create new space for themselves attempting to create new nation-states, where one had been. This is what Taiwan has done. In geographic, cultural, and ideological space Taiwan is asserting itself increasingly as not part of the mainland Chinese, but making a claim to its own independent space. This is important to my research as it show where Taiwan was heading during the course of the Taiwan Strait Crisis and how its search for a space of its own defined, both the First Taiwan Strait Crisis and the ones to follow.

Historically, Taiwan is not considered part of the Chinese core, the core being territory controlled by the Chinese empires dating back to the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE.). It was only into the 1600's when the Ming Dynasty (1638-1644 CE.) started the process of conquering and subjecting the island, a task the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912 CE.) Taiwan's annexation by Japan was the result of the Qing Empire's defeat by Japan in the Sino-Japanese war. Fifty years later the island was relinquished by Japan in the *Treaty of San Francisco* to no one. The Chinese Communist Party had control of China, and the United States arranged for Japan to surrender the island, but did not ceded the island to any government, leaving it in an undefined status. However, the ROC had lost the Chinese Civil War and had moved their political power base to Taiwan. This change in Taiwan's relationship to the central Chinese power base displays a lack of truth to the modern ideal of the nation-state with set borders which are easily defined, and shows how historical disagreements over border can be exaggerated into international conflicts when conflated with nationalism and ideologies. These conflicts over space are not new to China, in 1912, Mongolia and Tibet broke free from the newly independent Chinese republic, however Tibet would be pulled back into the nation. This paper looks at how China asserted its nationalism in the years following the collapse of the Qing Empire.

We will explore the state of the field as it relates to the relationship of space and nationalism with the aid of two works of theory, two works which deal with both theory and practice in other polities in the world, although we will only be looking at how their theories relate to Chinese nationalism, and five works which relate directly with my research focus of Taiwan. We will also look at how the theories and approaches used in by environmental historians can be applied to Taiwan's place in the Chinese nation.

## 2. Foundational works and Early Theory on Space in History

Traditionally, geography and history were considered as two different academic disciplines that did no overlap. Geography often ignored historical processes and focused on the here and now. Historical narratives often looked to geography and space as just the backdrop of historical events, rather than an active part of historical processes. In the middle part of the twentieth century historians begun to incorporate geography into their historical works as an active player in the historical narrative. This is to say that the geography of a place changes the historical process if it otherwise was not there. In this way, historians begin to add a geographic dimension to their work and started to think about how historical structures, like nation-states, interacted with and responded to space. East's *The Geography Behind History* and Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* are some of the early works that combined geography and history into a new and innovative approach towards understanding space and its effect on historical process (East, 1965 and Lefebvre, 1974).

Published in 1965, *The Geography Behind History* by East, looks to make the geography of a region and human knowledge of that geography, maps, charts, etc., part of the historical record. East's work is a theoretical, which attempts to offer a method by which geography can be inserted into the historical narrative. East argues that history cannot ignore geography as every event occurs both in a place in time and space, and historians need to account for both. In an attempt to find geography's place in history, East presents the main problem which will plague environmental historians; environmental determinism. In this, East tries to establish a balance between environmental determinism and an a-geographic approach. By attempting to use geography as a historical document akin to traditional sources, which he believes can create a balance between the two extremes of environmental determinism and an a-geographic history (East, 1-7).

East uses geography as a historical document by introducing a geographic term, the region, and explains how it could be used by historians. East defines the region as an area with a "certain uniformity in either physical or human sense" and argues that these regions can be studied in many ways to understand everything about them, soil type, rock types, and others features. However, East also argues that these regions can be used to look back into the past by looking at how people have used them over time to shape their lives. The example that he uses is that of the colonies the Greek states set up in ancient times. East points to the east Mediterranean as a region which the Greek established their colonies, both because they were not already settled, and because they had sea access. East argues that this method of approaching history has with it the tools to create meaningful connection across time and space (East, 7-14).

Where East only attempts to add a geographic term to history, Lefebvre goes further in attempting to solve problems he sees in the field as providing a broad theoretical framework for understanding space. Published in 1974, Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* attempts to put forward a list of problems a theory of the science of space would need to solve to be useful to the field and for scholars. Lefebvre argues that the traditional philosophical approach toward space has failed to provide a meaningful theory for the practical theory of space. With this, Lefebvre argues that a theory of space needs to explain how political, social and technological space influence our lives under a capitalist system. Lefebvre argues that this theory needs to be based in science and needs to connect human geography with physical geography to bridge gaps in the field. While Lefebvre doesn't provide a theory of the science of space himself, his contribution to the field is framing the problems that any working theory needs to answer to be valid (Lefebvre, 1-24).

Lefebvre's lack of a theory of the science of space makes his work seem less significant than East's. However, during this early period in the field it is important to understand how geography has been studied, how space has been interrupted by philosophers, and what problems historians are trying to solve by bringing geography into the field. Lefebvre's framing of these issues allows us to better understand later developments as the field evolves (Lefebvre, 1-24).

Both *The Geography Behind History* and *The Production of Space* provided foundational theories and practical applications of geography to the study of history. East's use of the region as an area with a "certain uniformity in either physical or human sense" is interesting for my research as I examine the Taiwan Strait Crisis, as this approach to defining regions could be used in areas of conflict as the People Republic of China and the Republic of China fight over disputed islands and territory between

the two areas of control of the rival governments. Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* can aid my research in terms of framing the problem and questions needed to be answered in the field and how these problems need to be framed considering the limitations of the field (East and Lefebvre).

### 3.Modern day application of space for analysis of the State

These ideas of geography and space as it relates to history have widespread implications that environmental historians are still working through and applying to all areas of historical study. As it relates to my research, I am interested in how space is managed by a nation and their political relationship to that space. This is of vital importance as it relates to the Chinese nation, because the Chinese nation can be divided into five or even six governments. These include the PRC, Hong Kong, Macau, the ROC, the Tibetan government in exile, and we could argue Mongolia since the ROC claims sovereignty over it. By looking at how the different governments within the Chinese nation interact with one another allows us to understand how modern states are often constructed haphazardly.

Therefore, to understand the state's relationship to space and to apply geographic considerations to history, we should look to works which apply geographic and spatial dimension into historical narratives. The works we will look at are *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* and *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. These works provide insights into my research as they look to examine the state's relationship with its geographic space (Merchant, 2000 and Scott 1999).

*Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* by Carolyn Merchant, published in 2010, looks at the economic progress made in the northeast United States over the period of 1600-1860 to understand the nature of the economic change that occurred over that period. Merchant is interested in the different economic systems and how they have evolved. Merchant argues that this period in this region is a microcosm of the economic evolution experienced by western Europe over the last 2,000 years. Believing that an analysis will provide a greater understanding of the socio-economic development of the Western world. *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* seeks to examine the economic progress of New England over 1600 to 1860 and look at the ecological impact of that economic progress by looking at two different economic transformations, colonial ecological revolution and capitalist ecological revolution. Her two-main theorist whom she draws on to create her own methodical approach is Thomas Khun, a historian of science and Karl Marx, a man who needs no introduction (Merchant, 1-30).

Merchant's methodical approach is a blending of the ideas of these two theorists into a central thesis which can explain the progression in the relationship between nature and the people who lived in New England. From Khun she takes his theory of the development of scientific progress through the development of paradigms, and from Marx she takes the idea of the dialectic within society, among other ideas, and blends these ideas into a new narrative of ecological progress she calls "gendered dialectic". This theory seeks to connect social and natural reproduction into one theory of progress by combining Marx's dialectic and Khun's paradigms. Her new "gendered dialectic" looks a lot like the Marxian idea of structures where there exists a base (economy), structures (production and social relationships), and super structures (ideas), but rather Merchants gendered dialectic has production, reproduction and consciousness. While some of the theory has some cross over with Marx, her main addition is the blend of ecological considerations to this interaction. Her theory and method provide insight into how social-economic forces drive political development, which can be applied broadly in different regions, such as the Taiwan Straits. In 1895, when Japan annexed the island there was little infrastructure and Japan advanced all industry on the island at an accelerated rate. By 1945, Japan had spent 50 years building infrastructure to better incorporate the island into the expanding Japanese empire (Merchant, 1-30).

Published in 1999, James Scott's *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* looks at programs initiated by the state which attempted to transform and modernize the nation, but resulted in catastrophe. He looks at collectivization in the USSR, The Great Leap Forward in the PRC, and villagization in Mozambique, Tanzania, and Ethiopia. Scott's main interest to understanding these failures is by providing an analysis of the modern state's unique power over the space in controls, compared to pre-modern states. His analysis seeks to provide a post-hoc analysis to explain why these failures occurred and what features are common to them (Scott, 1-8).

I will say at the start of our analysis of Scott's work that I am critical of his thesis, and I believe his conclusions are not that significant. With that said I believe, Scott's frame work of analysis for these state sponsored failures require engagement because Scott presents an innovative approach to looking at how modern nation-states differ from pre-modern politics in terms of their interaction with the environment and space. Scott argues that these programs, collectivization in the USSR, The Great

Leap Forward in the PRC, and villagization in Mozambique, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, share four basic components; “1. Government reordering of natural or traditional society, 2. High modernist ideology, 3. Authoritarian power that can impose idealistic plans and 4. A population without the strength or means to resist the authoritarian directives.” (Scott, 1-8).

With these four different elements Scott makes assumptions and assertions that not only provided an analysis for the relationship between the state and space, but also looks at China’s relationship to its space, with his analysis of the Great Leap Forward. By briefly exploring each one of these we dive into Scott’s analysis tool for understanding what key connections these social failures have in common, which presents us with his theory for space and the nations relationship to it (Scott, 1-8).

We will be first looking at the first, third and fourth of these four elements to Scott’s argument, which are the thinnest in terms of their impact of his argument, and then we will look at his concept of the High Modernist Ideology. The “Government reordering of natural or traditional society”, is a key part of Scott’s analysis because for these failures to occur they must be initiated. Now this seems like a clear point, however diving into this unravels a key element to this argument. This point draws on Scott’s clear differentiation of the modern state from the forms it took in the pre-modern period. The modern state is unique in that it can consolidate power into its own hands for these massive societal wide transformations of the nation to be possible, whereas the pre-modern state would not have had the resources (Scott, 1-8).

His last two elements of his analysis are authoritarianism and population without the means of preventing these schemes. I think this point is best in highlighting the weakness in Scott’s overall argument. Authoritarianism is not like an on/off switch, but rather it is a range in which governments can move along over time. It is true that both of Scott’s examples of the USSR and the PRC were, during the period he is looking at, authoritarian. However, Scott’s analysis looks at these failures by governments and doesn’t appear to examine if government successes also share these four elements (Scott, 1-8).

To draw a contrast to Scott’s argument that an authoritarian government can reorder the traditional society and have benefits, I would point to three key policies of the Chinese government; One Child policy, the post 1978 reforms of the economy, and environmental projects, such as the Three Gorges Dam. These three policies display success stories of an authoritarian government’s reordering of the traditional society and environment. Respectively these policies have prevented the birth of 500 million people in a densely populated nation, lifted 400 million people out of poverty, and provided much needed electric power to their nation which resulted in altering the rotation of the Earth because of it shifting water on the planet. All three radically shifted the human and natural geography of the Chinese nation. James Scott is something of a modern-day American Libertarian, and I think his anti-government approach to his analysis may have something to do with his political ideology, rather than these government schemes sharing these four elements (Scott, 1-8).

High modernist ideology is the key elements to Scott’s argument that I believe is the most interesting as an idea in and of itself, and should be used in the study of the Taiwan Strait Crisis. This concept of High Modernist Ideology is Scott trying to bring into a single idea, the belief that existed in the late 1800’s and into the early 1900’s, that science and technology would and could eliminate all human problems in the society. Scott defines this concept as follows.

At its center was a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws. (Scott, 1-8).

This idea looks at the space that humans inhabit as increasingly being dominated by human thought and control. This concept is Scott’s major advancement in the field. This can be used as tool of analysis for to my research on Chinese nationalism and the dispute over the Taiwan Straits because both sides of the conflict used this High Modernist Ideology, as defined by Scott, to dominate the space they had access too. Despite ideology differences of the PRC, Communism with their Chinese twist, and the ROC, early on Fascism and latter pro-western military dictatorship, both had at their core this high modernist ideology that they used to shape the history of the conflict and their respective regions (Scott, 1-8, 87-102).

#### **4. Space as it relates to Chinese nationalism and the Taiwan Straits**

Moving forward in our examination of the state of the field as it relates to the relationship of space and nationalism in the Taiwan Straits we will be going from general works in environmental history on theory and methods and to specific works on the Taiwan Straits and Taiwan’s place in the Chinese nation. Taiwan’s place in the Chinese nation is has been dynamic. First

conquered by the Ming Dynasty in the early seventeenth century, it would be later annexed by Japan in 1895, only to be unofficially returned to the government of the Republic of China, or ROC, in 1945. Despite being part of China for three hundred years, the Han Mandarin language never replaced the traditional language found on the island. This places Taiwan's culture as not entirely Chinese, leading many residents of Taiwan today to call for a complete break with China and the establishment of a Republic of Taiwan to replace the ROC. Taiwan is a politicized space and place that has had identities imposed on it over its history. Understanding its place in the Chinese nation is part of unraveling its identity. The five articles we will be looking at here are spread from 1976 to 2010. It is important to note that only the first article, "Chinese Frontier Settlement in Taiwan", comes before the creation of a strong native movement for the creation of an independent Taiwan. Also, I am approaching the articles by historical period, not by publication date, in order to present a better historical flow.

Published in 1976, Ronald Knapp's "Chinese Frontier Settlement in Taiwan" looks at Taiwan as a settler frontier for the growing population of the Ming Dynasty and examines the process of Chinese settlement in T'ao-yuan hsien in northwest Taiwan. Knapp's main conclusion is that the process that led settlers to Taiwan was not the Ming Empire using forces of arms, but rather a population migration because of excess population on the Chinese mainland. Knapp notes that Chinese population moved into Taiwan slowly and through agricultural and social interaction introduced the island's people to Chinese culture. Knapp's "Chinese Frontier Settlement in Taiwan" is important in understanding the history of Taiwan's place in the Chinese state as it provides a background and foundation for Chinese migration to the island. It also establishes China's connections with the island and displays Taiwan's independent culture and history as separate from China (Knapp, 1976, 43-59).

Published in 2005, Robert Eskildsen's "Taiwan: A Periphery in Search of a Narrative" looks at Taiwan as a border region in East-Asia and how Qing dynasty colonial management of the island led to Japanese annexation of the island. About this Eskildsen's argument is simple, he argues that the Qing Empire maintained a loose colonial government on the island which promoted Chinese culture among the inhabitants but did not use force. This gray zone of sovereignty in East-Asia was something that Japan did not want on their border. Therefore, even with the 1895, Sino-Japanese war taking place in Korea and Northeastern China, Taiwan was sort after for annexation because of its ambiguous sovereignty (Eskildsen, 2005, 281-94).

The arguments Eskildsen uses to support this thesis is important as it explores Taiwan's status in the Chinese state, but it also explores Taiwan's native sociocultural systems. Eskildsen contends that the weak government apparatus on the island before Japanese annexation allowed Chinese inhabitants to live alongside Aborigine inhabitants peacefully. This was done by Qing Dynasty officials giving power to local institutions that limited their own, trading political power for peace. With Japanese annexation this system was turned on its head. The Japanese Empire was not interested in giving political power to locals and set about dismantling the local political institutions that had kept peace on the island in favor of promoting Japanese imperial policy of integration (Eskildsen, 281-94).

Eskildsen article is about the history and development of the local political institutions that maintained Aborigine inhabitant identity independent of the Chinese. This article has massive impacts for the history of the Taiwan Strait crises as we can sum up the ROC regime as a Chinese regime imposed on an Aborigine people, who had been under both Chinese and Japanese colonial governments for centuries, and not entirely in favor of promoting themselves as the real Chinese nation in opposition to the Chinese mainland PRC government. Rather this policy of placing the ROC government in opposition to the PRC was imposed on the island inhabitants by the soldiers of the ROC regime. Therefore, the modern social movement to create a Republic of Taiwan is gaining support from these historical causes. As the modern ROC modernized and the Aborigine inhabitants gained power in the political space of the larger Chinese nation, they argue not for unity, but for their own nation and independence (Eskildsen, 281-94).

Peter Perdue's "China and Other Colonial Empires", published in 2009, explores how we can define the Qing Empire relationships to external nations under the Qing Empire's tribute system and the empire's relationship to conquered people within the empire. Perdue points out that many modern scholars, Chinese scholars in particular, do not want to view the Qing Empire as a colonial state, as China itself was a victim of colonialism. Perdue compares three different terms, "Asymmetry, Colonialism, and Tribute", as they relate to China's relationships to external tribute states and internal subjugated peoples. Perdue argues that the Qing Dynasty's relationship towards Taiwan was one of colonial imperial goals which promoted Chinese culture over local culture and allowed Chinese immigrants to the area to settle. Because of the scale of non-Chinese inhabitants of the island it was not even a proper province of the empire until 1885, but rather an unincorporated territory, this also occurred with the Qing Empire's other colonial areas of the empire, Xinjiang. Perdue's article aids us in understanding Taiwan's place in the overall Chinese empire as a border region who was subject to Chinese imperial policy and considered not a proper part of the empire until two centuries after its conquest (Perdue, 2009, 85-103).

Published in 2001, Ann Heylen's "From Local to National History: Forces in the Institutionalisation of a Taiwanese Historiography" is the first of our sources that occurs after Taiwan had established itself as a western democratic state, with a Republic of Taiwan independence movement. Ann Heylen's article is trying to establish a Taiwan historiography independent, but interconnected, with Chinese historiography. Heylen's article is important as it helps us understand how Taiwan saw itself during the crisis. In 1945, following the ROC's reoccupation of the island there was a strong effort made by the new national government to reinforce upon itself and its new local citizens that they, the ROC government, represented four thousand years of Chinese history and were the legal and legitimate government of all China. Heylen's article is important for understanding the space of the Taiwan Strait crisis as it helps us understand where Taiwan fits into the Chinese historiography narrative, which is not wholly Chinese, or wholly not Taiwanese. Taiwan is a border region which during the crisis was occupied by millions of soldiers who came over from the mainland to rule and to create what they lost on the Chinese mainland (Heylen, 2001, 39-51).

The last article we have to look at is another on the development of a historiography of Taiwan. Damien Morier-Genoud's "Taiwanese Historiography: Towards a "Scholarly Native History", published in 2010. Despite what may or may not have happened in history, what is often more important for a state in achieving its national goals is how history is taught. Genoud's article looks at how history has been taught in universities in Taiwan. Genoud's article divides the history of Taiwan historiography into three periods; Japanese occupation, Guomindong dictatorship, 1945-1988, and the state of the field after martial law was removed. With these two earlier periods the history courses in universities taught, respectively, Taiwan place in Japanese history and Chinese history. Only after 1988 did the scholarship moved towards a history of the people of the island, rather than the history of their imperial overlords. This is important as it highlights in the depth of the 1960's during the Taiwan crisis where its leadership saw themselves and the people they ruled (Morier-Genoud, 2010, 79-91).

## 5. Conclusion

Imperialism, colonialism, and Cold War ideologies had broken the Qing Empire apart, and the new Chinese republic attempted to put the pieces back together. How, the downfall of the Qing Empire lay bare the claim that China's government was unable to deal with the different competing regions desire for control of the national government. This allowed sub-national groups to break away, Mongolia, Xijiang, Tibet. Ala the while Macau, Hong Kong, and Taiwan continued to be controlled by colonial powers. Once the center started putting back together the Chinese state it became clear Taiwan's place in the Chinese nation is a gray zone, not entirely in and not entirely out, although with time this could change.

By examining the state of the field in this essay of historiography of space as it relates to Taiwan's place in the Chinese nation, I think we can say that environmental history can offer unique insights into old historical problems such as colonialism, nationalism, and conflicts. My argument that the nation-state controls a geographic, cultural, and ideology space in which it has sole authority in which to govern and administer, holds up with the geographic, cultural, and ideology space it does hold, not the space it claims to own, with a consolidation and realignment of reality with ideology perhaps we can come to think of Taiwan as a true nation-state, not born of China, but perhaps midwifed. As my research has moved towards a study of Chinese-Taiwan-USA diplomatic relations it is important to understand the geographic, cultural, and ideology space that these three different government claims, and control.

By understanding the history of these conflicts and the spatial dimensions of colonialism and modern nationalism, we can understand the border historical perspective. After examining the foundational works of theory, application of space for analysis of the state, such as the Ottoman Empire and other examples, and an analysis of works relating to space as it relates to Chinese nationalism and the Taiwan Straits, I think I can conclude that Taiwan found itself during the crisis as the epicenter of a conflict that did not directly relate to its historical and spatial connection to the Chinese nation. Rather, I think we can conclude that Taiwan's place in the Taiwan Strait Crisis is an island of people caught between competing ideologies of the day that resulted in the aftermath of colonialism, both Chinese and Japanese, and imperialism.

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